THE VISIONS OF Sir Heiſter Ryley: WITH OTHER ENTERTAINMENTS.

Wednesday February 14. 1710.

From my Houſe in St. James's Square. *February* 13.

I Was laſt Week in the Fields, and other ſolitary Places for near a whole Day, as being at that Time altogether unprovided with any Matter ſuitable to my Genius. My Humour was neither ſerious enough to treat of Divine Subjects, nor ſo profane as to run into riotous Exceſſes; yet I hated to be idle, when I ſaw every Aſpen-Leaf on the Trees, where ever I came in ſuch a quick ſort of Motion, as if they had been ſent in haſte to and fro on a thouſand different Errands. Upon this Thought, I reſolved rather than be doing nothing, to lay aſide all manner of Gravity, and apply my ſelf to the little Fancies of a Child, in taking notice of the trifling Actions of ſuch inconſiderable Animals as are ſoon diſmantled of their Forms, and fall into Obſcurity. In this odd Adventure, I was entertain'd with abundance of ſmall Curioſities very amuſing to the weak Capacity of Life, I had then thought fit to place my ſelf in. My Employment was to obſerve how all thoſe little Beings manag'd their ſmall Concerns, after what manner they ſhelter themſelves from the Violence of the Weather, the Care they take to prevent ſudden Injuries, with the ſeveral Sports and Paſtimes practis'd among them; what Meaſures they commonly make uſe of to preſerve their Health, or reſtore it when impair'd, and the Ceremonies ſome of them perform in burying their Dead. I had not been long upon theſe Searches, before I underſtood ſomewhat of their Plots and Contrivances, many of which were very Politick, and others as mean and inſignificant. I found that they all paſs'd through many changeable Progreſſes, under the various Scenes of Gayety and Cruelty: For as ſoon as they had laid their Schemes in their publick Aſſemblies, they went out to their particular Labours or Pleaſures. Some made Journies to the Baths, to drink the Waters, or waſh their naked Bodies; others ſat out of their Habitations ſingle or in,

Pairs, to hunt for Prey, or hide in Corners for fear of being taken as Prizes themſelves: Some again were engag'd in bold Attempts, and kill'd by the ſportive Image of a Fight, for ſo ſilly a thing as a Mote or a Straw: Others who were ſo minute as they might have been cover'd in a Drop of Water or a Froth, were committing violent Outrages, and breaking open their Neighbours Store-Houſes; theſe, without any Mercy, pillag'd and carry'd off the whole Stock of Proviſion, laid up by the careful Owners. Several lay idling in the Sun, or ſleeping under the Shades of Leaves; abundance were running about upon immaterial Matters, or ſwimming in the ſhallow Streams after a Bait ſo ſmall, as it could not eaſily be diſcern'd. Thus they ſpent their Time in a thouſand ſuch little different Amuſements; and were often in their Enterprizes, either by Chance or Negligence broken in Pieces, or cruſh'd into Flatneſs. One thing is more eſpecially remarkable, which I muſt not forget to mention; A poor Frog who had been aſſaulted and wounded by his Enemy in a furious Combat, was deſerted as an Alien by all his Companions, and lay ſtruggling a great while under much Pain; at laſt, not being able to endure it any longer, he ſtretch'd out his Limbs and expir'd. Another little Creature no bigger than a Bubble, crept out of a hollow Flint as dark as Midnight; he was very ſick and crawling along with a ſtrange kind of Weakneſs to ſeek for Cure among his noted Plants or Weeds; and when he found them he enter'd immediately into a regular Courſe of taking his Medicines. Being affected with this laſt Inſtance, I made a further Enquiry, and found out an aged Beetle, who had by an unfortunate Accident loſt two of his Legs. This Inſect had ſeveral of his own Creatures about him, who were very diligent in removing him from off the hard and common Path, where he had met with the Miſchance. Near him, there lay a Snail in as bad a Condition, with his Houſe terribly ſhatter'd: The ruined Inhabitant was ſtill alive, but very much bruiſed by the falling in of his Roof; for his Head and one half of his Body were got out of the Door, and endeavouring by many Struggles to diſengage the other Parts from among the broken Ruins of the Building; yet he could not accompliſh his Deſign; there he continued half at Liberty and half Impriſon'd. According to the miſerable Fate he had undergone, it was impoſſible he could ſtand the Shock of a bigger Blow, or continue two Days longer from being covered up in the Duſt. Paſſing a little farther, I met with a Crowd of ſmall Creatures, going in a full Body, and three or four of them were carrying on their Backs, at the Head of the Company, one of their Dead: I follow'd this numerous Aſſembly, and ſaw them interr the Deceaſed with much Decency under the Leaves in the Earth, among others of the ſame ſpecies: Looking into their Charnel-Houſe, I obſerv'd that ſome were reduc'd to Silence, as ſoon as they began to live, and others had eſcap'd the Deſtiny, to arrive at a longer Period. Theſe were ſome of the Diſaſters I ſaw befel thoſe Beings, which were of ſo ſmall a Bulk, that moſt of them might have been toſſed like the lighter Parts of Snow with every Wind; and indeed they are little more than Airy Vapours; meer

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Phantoms, not the Matter of a Shower, or ſubſtantial enough to make a Cloud: However, not being fully ſatisfied in beholding theſe little Miracles of Wonder, I went and viſited Animals of quite different Natures, whoſe Actions ſtruck me with the Deſcription of every thing that is venomous and ſubtil. A Toad, who was ſitting on a Bank diverting himſelf in his uſual Enjoyment, ſtood up mightily in Defence of his Rights and Privileges; for as ſoon as I enter'd within the Circles of his Bounds, he ſpit Poiſon at me, and made a very vigorous Defence; no Stratagems were capable of making him to abandon his Territories, till he was oblig'd to it by Force; and then he retreated in very good Order to the Water, where there was no coming at him. This Polititian ſent me to enquire after the Snakes, a Generation yet more wiſe, who entertain'd me with ſeveral new Scenes, no leſs brave and ſurprizing; they either fled in good time, or prevented their being attack'd, till they were prepar'd to make a regular Reſiſtance: One more politick than the reſt, climb'd up a Tree, and bid me Defiance; another arm'd with an undaunted Courage, made up at me, with great Vehemency: All the Oppoſition I could make, was not ſufficient to abate his Fury, before he had in a very ſevere manner made me ſenſible of the Sharpneſs of his Sting; and then he immediately took Sanctuary in a Fort which could not be enter'd. The Intrigues of theſe Creatures led my Curioſity to pry into the Nature of the Moles and Worms, that live out of the Light of the Sun, Moon and Stars: Their Wit and Sagacity, tho' of another kind, was little inferior to the Serpents; for I found 'em all in Motion, buſying themſelves in the ſeveral Paſſages commonly made uſe of by ſuch ſort of Animals; ſome were employ'd upon one Adventure, and ſome on another; a Company of Worms had with great Skill and Dexterity, laid Siege to the Coffin of a Miſer, and made above a hundred Breaches in his Winding Sheet; no People well skill'd in the Art of War, could have carry'd on their Approaches with more Silence, and proſperous Succeſs than they had done; the manner of digging their hollow Caverns was very admirable, and took me up abundance of Time to ſearch into: At laſt I perceived how judiciouſly they work'd their way under Ground, through many winding Labyrinths; and tho' they were often loſt, and entangled among the Crooked and By-Alleys they were conſtrain'd to paſs through; yet I ſaw they were not always confin'd Priſoners for Life: For when their Paths were by any Accident barracado'd up, they very prudently forc'd a Paſſage another way. All the ſeveral Turns and Actions of theſe Multitudes of different Species, which paſs'd through a Series of pretty artful Inventions, fill'd up the vacant Leaves in my Pocket-Book; I had no room left to mention how they humour'd in their Natures, Inſtincts and Modes of Life, which is to be obſerved in Creatures of much larger Dimenſions. I returned from theſe Entertainments, with a full purpoſe to ſpend the Evening in Company, with three or four old Blades who never fail to divert me with odd Stories of what happen'd when they were taken up with military Affairs: But as ſomething very ſingular generally falls out, which gives me either much delight or Diſturbance; when I came home, I was ſent for to viſit an Atheiſt, whom I had lately been engag'd with in ſeveral hot Diſputes; and was ſo plain as to tell him at our laſt Conference, That the whole Scene of Nature could be no more fram'd of it ſelf, or the leaſt Creature that lives within the vaſt Circle of it, than a Man can think to cut a large Book of the Hiſtory of *Europe* into Millions of Slips, and by placing

placing them in a well contriv'd Engine, Matters ſhould happen ſo lucky, that after the moving of the Springs and Wheels for ſome Time, every broken Scrap may join together, and each Leaf and Page come again to its perfect Shape, as when firſt bound up in the Volume. When I came to him I found he had met with as fatal a Diſaſter as the poor Animals the Frog, the Snail and the Beetle; he told me he had been that Evening engaged in a Duel, and unfortunately received a mortal Wound: The Diſorder I ſaw in him was ſo great, that he could not hide it from me, tho' he attempted it by making uſe of ſeveral Diſguiſes. After many changeable Turns of Thought, he deſir'd to diſcourſe me without Light or Company, finding his Mind to be fill'd with ten thouſand confus'd Ideas: I took the Opportunity to give him ſome Hints of his wild and extravagant Notions, and ſpoke much of the Animals I had ſeen that day: I told him all Creatures, except Man, owned a Creator, and ſung a kind of Hymn to the Supreme Effence, tho' they appeared to the Eye never ſo mean and trifling in their Paſſages and Actions. There was ſcarce one Inſtance I had made Obſervations upon in the ſmalleſt Creature, but what I took an Occaſion to mention to him; the Worms and the Moles I diſcourſed very particularly of, and the manner of the Funerals I had obſerved among the Bees, who I ſaid had none to weep for them, or to lay Marble over their Sepulchres: I ſet off every thing in a very ſolemn Dreſs, to put him in Mind of the vaſt Eternity he was juſt ready to take a Step into. He returned me no manner of Anſwer, but kept all I ſaid to him in his Memory, till one a Clock the next Morning; then he frankly owned to me his Perplexities which he could not get rid of. Sir *Heiſter*, (ſays he) now I have reviv'd a Senſe of all thoſe Schemes you laid down, whereby I might diſtingniſh how I at firſt fell off by a certain Looſeneſs of Principle: What I formerly argued to you, was no more than an artificial Leſſon I had got by Heart, to make my Conceptions appear to the World out of the common way of thinking; as having a fond Ambition of being counted more knowing in the Secrets of Nature, than Men of Probity and Experience. Seeing he had pull'd off his Mask, and 'twas too late to make uſe of any more Arguments, I ſat ſilent the laſt half hour of his Life, as if I wanted to be inſtructed by him, which he did very effectually; for every Sigh and Word preſented to me a ſad Tragedy of his unhappy State; and at laſt, to confirm me in the Belief of the Deity, he exſpir'd in a dreadful Scene of Deſpair. This Accident ſent me home at Four in the Morning, where I drew out all his Sweats and Pains, which I ſaw lay fix'd as ſo many rude Strokes in every Feature, and looked upon this ſort of Infidels as the moſt unaccountable Animals in Nature. Take them in their Raptures, they are nothing elſe but a kind of exalted Whims or Allegorical Fictions: A Parrot may be heard to ſpeak better Senſe, when he is asked by way of Queſtion, one of the oddeſt Stories he was ever taught: I have frequently traced thoſe Monſters in their Actions, and found the Images that move in Landskips, to act Parts much more uniform and agreeable to Reaſon: For the ſedateſt Thoughts of ſuch mighty Leviathans are only like the diſtracted Dreams of a Mad-Man; do but awake 'em out of the deep Sleep of Indfidelity, and you'll find them loſt among a thouſand intricate Mazes, they then take the fineſt Objects in the Creation for ſo many frightful Ghoſts come to haunt them: The leaſt Creature that crawls about the Woods, furniſhes the Eye with ſomething adorn'd with a much brighter Embelliſhment, than is to be ſeen in their Death. Whilſt I was in the midſt of theſe agreeable Contemplations, I look'd upon my two Enemies the Serpent and the Toad, (by whom I had been ſo lately attack'd and overcome) as far greater Politicians than the Atheiſt I was juſt come from viſiting, who is now ſtripp'd into a naked Spirit, and ſet on Shore in the inviſible World.

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